

# I ate children's hearts, ex-rebel says

By Jonathan Paye-Layleh  
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**Milton Blahyi, a former feared rebel commander in Liberia's brutal civil war, has admitted to taking part in human sacrifices as part of traditional ceremonies intended to ensure victory in battle.**

He said the sacrifices "included the killing of an innocent child and plucking out the heart, which was divided into pieces for us to eat."

There had been numerous rumours of human sacrifices during the 1979-93 conflict but this is the first time anyone has admitted publicly to the practice.

Mr Blahyi, 37, is better known in Liberia as "General Butt Naked" because he went into combat with no clothes on, to scare the enemy.

He is now an Evangelist preacher, who prefers to use the name Joshua.

He was speaking to the BBC, after telling Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that his forces had killed 20,000 people.

## Forgiveness

Mr Blahyi said he had first become exposed to killings in 1982 when, at the age of 11, he was ordained "the traditional priest of my tribe."

He explained that when a rebellion broke out against President Samuel Doe, he had to go to war on behalf of the president, as they were from the same Krahn ethnic group.

**" If you have an individual admitting that he and his group killed over 20,000 people, certainly there should be a mechanism put in place for such people to face justice "**  
Mulbah Morlue  
Forum for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court

He fought against the militia of Charles Taylor, currently on trial for war crimes in The Hague.

As the traditional priest, he says he persuaded the "hesitant" political leaders of his faction to make a human sacrifice before going into battle.

"They asked me to do it in secret; but some of the sacrifices are supposed to be as a ceremony; so my boys and I made some of the sacrifices in the open."

Mr Blahyi did not say where they had found the children to be killed.

He said he thought that confessing to what he had done and asking for forgiveness could help heal the country's wounds.

"I have been looking for an opportunity to tell the true story about my life; and every time I tell people my story, I feel relieved," he said, drinking a bottle of tomato juice in the capital, Monrovia.

## 'Ashamed'

Mr Blahyi stopped fighting in 1996, saying God appeared to him as he was charging naked into battle and told him he was doing Satan's work.

He is now often seen preaching on street corners and churches in Monrovia.

**" I could be electrocuted, I could be hanged "**  
Milton Blahyi

"I now preach against murder and making human sacrifices," he said.

"Some people see me and congratulate me.

"Others see me and say I should not be walking down the streets of Monrovia posing proud. But I continue to tell such people I am not proud, I am ashamed."

Between the time he was ordained a "traditional priest" and the time he stopped fighting, he said, "more than 20,000 people fell victim - they were killed."

## Warlord

Liberia's TRC, modelled on South Africa's post-apartheid commission, began hearings earlier this month.

Some Liberians, however, say their body is too weak and argue that a war crimes court should be established - Mr Taylor is being accused by a court set up to investigate the conflict in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

"If you have an individual admitting that he and his group killed over 20,000 people, certainly there should be a mechanism put in place for such people to face justice," said Mulbah Morlue, who heads the Forum for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia.

The war is now over but some 15,000 UN peacekeepers remain in the country.

While asking for forgiveness, Mr Blahyi says he's ready for whatever the TRC decides to do to him.

"I could be electrocuted, I could be hanged," he said. "But I think forgiveness and reconciliation is the right way to go."

He also urged other former fighters to confess their doings because "wherever they go there is a stigma on them".

But another former warlord, Prince Johnson, says he will not appear before the commission unless he is compelled to do so.

Mr Johnson, now a senator, led the forces who tortured and killed then President Doe in 1990. The video of this brutal killing is still on sale in Liberia.

He says that he has already made his peace with the Doe family but would testify at the TRC if they lodged a formal complaint.